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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - State of the Union

Iran Hamas

PARIS - Thursday, February 02, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

State of the Union  
Iran  
Hamas

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Despite a plethora of domestic stories which capture the attention of today's front pages, President Bush's State of the Union address, the tug-of-war between the West and Iran and the Quartet's balancing act to juggle Hamas's electoral victory and its terrorist past are extensively reported, with wide editorial commentary on the SOTU and Iran. On SOTU, Les Echos comments: "The declarations of intent of George W. Bush are being welcomed with a certain skepticism. It's nevertheless undeniable that since his ascension in 2001, George W. Bush has not ceased to make the energy question one of his priorities." Regional editorials are particularly critical of the President's talk of "America's leadership." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

SOTU

"Bush Weakened"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (02/02): "It is a weakened George Bush who delivered his fifth State of the Union speech on January 31. The modesty of his proposals is in spectacular contrast to the ambition and assurance demonstrated in the 2003 and 2004 speeches. His approval rating has plummeted to 40%. In this context Mr. Bush could not afford to be flamboyant. The traditional litany on freedom and democracy. was pronounced but without an accompanying magic recipe. Realism prevailed, including on the thorny question of Iran. But how is it possible to [prevent Iran from acquiring the bomb] when a good part of the world depends on Iran for its supply of oil? No answer was given to this question during the speech. Mr. Bush promised to increase by 22% the funds for research for alternative fuels.. Adding that he intends to set in motion the possibility for the U.S. to reduce by 75% its dependence on Middle Eastern oil between now and 2025. It is significant that Mr. Bush decided to broach this sensitive and vital subject at this stage in American history. Realism also prompted him to mention China and India and the competition that these two giants represent in an area long dominated by the U.S.: scientific research. This is another challenge for America."

"The Energy Patriotism of George W. Bush"

Jean-Marc Vittori in right-of-center Les Echos (02/02): "George W. Bush wants to protect U.S. energy, just like Dominique de Villepin wants to save French businesses. In his seventh (sic) State of the Union speech, George W. Bush sounded an unusual theme for a former Texan oilman, even though he became president of the United States. `America is dependent on oil which is often imported from unstable regions of the world.' However, America will have difficulties reducing this portion (of its energy imports). George W. Bush knows that the energy question is once again becoming a key one. The rise in prices, Iranian blackmail, the Ukrainian crisis, the cracks in Saudi Arabia, the Chinese takeovers of foreign oil companies, and the bravado of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez reveal an unbalanced oil market. (but) the path described by George W. Bush is not up to the measure. Even the heads of American business know it: in order for the United States to follow a true energy policy, it will need to await his successor."

"A Global Battle for Energy"

Philippe Waucampt in regional Le Republicain Lorrain (02/02): "The U.S. President's sole role was to try to defuse America's worries while remaining totally colorless. The only thing new was his will to make America self-sufficient in terms of energy. It is clear that India and China's growth potential are a source of concern for the U.S."

#### "Leading the World"

Gerard Noel in regional La Liberte de l'Est (02/02):

"President Bush once again reiterated that 'America must lead the world.' Will the countries he fingered, Syria, Burma, North Korea and Iran, be suffering the same fate as Iraq? Not likely: the American President is too criticized on his own turf to dare get involved in another quagmire."

#### "American Leadership"

Patrick Fluckiger in regional L'Alsace (02/02): "The U.S. President's grandiloquence on America's leadership is a shield for a President on the defensive. This has not stopped him from being particularly aggressive and pursuing his policy of the carrot and the stick: subsidies for countries that march to the U.S. tune, and the stick for all the rest. While Europe remembers what followed its refusal to follow in the Iraqi adventure, we can rightly feel concern upon hearing President Bush say 'the only way to ensure peace is for America to lead.'"

#### "American Leadership: A Mission from God?"

Jean Levallois in regional La Presse de La Manche (02/02):

"Not only has President Bush ignited a powder keg in the Middle East, he has managed to get Latin America to turn its back on the U.S. Wanting to lead the world is okay if it is through example, success and respect for others. If it is through the belief that it is a god-given mission, the experience has already been tried and no one needs it."

#### Iran

##### "Iran: A Dangerous Vacuum"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/02): "After the Iraqi adventure, diplomacy has taken over at the White House. But sanctions are not the answer: they would have little impact in Iran. Before March 6 deadline, Russia and China will try to convince Iran to stop its uranium enrichment program. Putting the issue in the hands of the UNSC re-enforces the IAEA's position. Despite the impression of hesitation, pressure on Iran is increasing. President Bush last evening called for a change of regime in Iran: but that is not in the cards. President Bush's strategy lacks solutions for the mid-term when it comes to Iran, just like it did for Hamas. Once again there is a dangerous vacuum between the ideal democratization of the Middle East and the day-to-day management of the Iranian crisis."

##### "Iran: the Need for a Coercive Strategy"

Laurent Murawiec of the Hudson Institute in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/02): "What is new in Iran is not the verbal threats made by Ahmadinejad, but rather the nuclear threat to implement what Iran's Jihaddists have been imposing on its own people. For years the West has tried to engage in a dialogue with Iran, and appears surprised that the dialogue has not worked. But the West has been fooled by Iranian ideology: every time the West is confronted with a totalitarian regime, western democracies are ignorant of the role of ideology. Ahmadinejad's diatribe against the Jews is his way of creating an artificial crisis in order to re-arrange his positions, inside and outside Iran. The West is guilty of pusillanimity. While Bush put Iran in the axis of evil, he was convinced by Richard Armitage that 'Iran was a democracy!' Worse, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq has been allowed to engage with the Ayatollahs, who with the Syrians are the number one supporters of terror in Iran. Despite Bush's grandiloquence about democracy for the Middle East, the U.S. is not supporting Iran's opponents. And as for Europe's diplomacy, one is torn between laughter and tears. The failure of diplomacy with regard to Iran is patent. The window of opportunity before Iran is in possession of nuclear weapons is beginning to close. It is time to think about a coercive strategy to avoid the ultimate resort of using force."

##### "The Hour of Truth for Iran."

Laurent Zecchini in left-of-center Le Monde (02/02): "Iran can no longer doubt in the international community's determination to stop its nuclear program, but it can still hope to be able to divide it on how to reach this goal. In this diplomatic game three countries - Russia, China and India - hold the winning cards while at the same time being restricted by their close relationship with Iran. Imposing sanctions will come at a later date, if Iran fails to grab the hand that is being held out to it by Europe, the U.S., Russia, China and India through the 'Russian Compromise'. If Iran chooses not to give up its nuclear program, the world will be faced with an international crisis. Russia, China and India are up against the wall: either they take sides with Europe and America, or they take sides with Iran. In short, their choice is between their own interests and those of the international community."

#### Hamas

##### "Hamas: It Would Be Prudent to Wait"

Jacques Amalric in left-of-center Le Figaro (02/02): "The

Quartet's decision to `wait' and to give Hamas time is not surprising. The Quartet wants to delay the hour of truth as much as possible, because it does not want to involve the Iranian factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed freezing the funds allotted to Hamas would in effect open the door for Iran to step in as the savior and protector of the Palestinian people. This would be a godsend for this Shiite regional power which is marching towards becoming a nuclear power and which has yet to play its Iraqi trump card. American and European diplomats know that the three months delay is nothing but a lesser evil while they try to influence the formation of the Palestinian government. But nobody knows whether these calculations will resist world events, or whether President Bush, who is less pragmatic than Secretary Rice, will, in time, reject them." STAPLETON